

MASON

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respected government spokesman, his opinion on U.S. health issues are heard worldwide.

And followed.

Even R. J. Reynolds, a powerful tobacco company, succumbed to Mason's wrath and canceled its Philadelphia fair marketing of a new cigarette after Mason blasted Reynolds for urging blacks to smoke "Upson."

In a recent interview with the *Detroit News*, Mason talked about his latest post, while responding candidly to questions about some of America's major health issues.

Q. How much is the federal government spending on AIDS?

A. The total expenditures for the U.S. government in 1989 were in the range of about \$2.8 billion.

Q. Should the government be spending more or less to combat AIDS?

A. "I think the nation is spending about what it needs to spend on biomedical research, working to develop chemotherapies and a vaccine. Whether you would get an incremental speed-up in what's being accomplished if you increased the funding is debatable. But for every dollar that you put in now, you are not going to get as much return on investment as you did. We are optimizing what we can do in the field of biomedical research.

Q. Federal AIDS funding exceeds funding for cancer, which killed more than 12 times as many people last year. Is that justified?

A. "Work being done on AIDS ... how the whole immune system of the body works, is coordinated and integrated. That's going to pay back in the field of cancer research."

Plus, AIDS is a communicable disease. "It makes sense to get in early, learn how the disease is spread, start educating people, put money into vaccine and chemotherapy research so we can get our arms around this disease as rapidly as possible — rather than letting it spread as widely as possible. Ultimately, however, I don't think you can justify those kinds of expenditures."

Q. Will disruptive behavior by AIDS advocacy groups ultimately result in AIDS patients being excluded from medical conferences?

A. "I hope not. I think I understand what motivates their behavior, but I disagree with it."

Q. Should travel restrictions be imposed on HIV-infected persons?

A. "I believe there should be free

travel of people between countries who are HIV-infected. I don't believe the movement of people who are HIV-infected from country to country has a negative effect in the context of endangering citizens of the United States. We already have too many infected people in the country.

Q. Should a record of their infection be noted in their passport?

A. "No. Immigration and Naturalization was identifying people who were HIV-positive and stamping that in their passport — like a scarlet A on their forehead — which often led to discrimination back in their country of origin. We worked with Immigration and Naturalization to eliminate this."

Q. President Bush will elevate the Environmental Protection Agency to Cabinet rank; Gov. Norm Bangerter will create a new Department of Environmental Health. Do you support their actions?

A. "Whether environmental health is part of the health department or at separate levels, it doesn't matter as long as the two are working closely together. When we are talking about Bryce, Zions or the Grand Canyon, then just the purity of the air is important. But beyond vistas, you have to set your tolerance levels in the context of health. Whether it's carbon monoxide or dioxide or ozone or acid rain, ultimately you come down to what does it do to health? If you don't maintain a close working relationship between health and environment, you don't have any end points to use and then you become lost."

Q. A recent National Institute of Medicine report said the public-health system is in disarray. Do you agree?

A. "I think both the public health system and the treatment-health system are in a bit of disarray. If we were to color those U.S. counties that have a comprehensive public-health system red, and leave those that don't white, do you know what the map of the United States would look like? Like measles. Red spots on a largely white map. So few of our local health departments are able and strong enough to deliver comprehensive public-health services to the citizens of this nation."

Q. What will it take to solve the problem?

A. "Money. We are willing to put untold billions of dollars into the treatment system, but we won't put into the prevention, promotion and primary care systems enough money to optimize the contribution they could make. If we are going to do anything about the disarray, state legislators, county commissioners, mayors are going to have to be willing to put the needed resources into public health. It will pay off."